1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

Chapter Five

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

In this chapter the main characteristics and events of childhood affecting both the social and psychological aspects of the individual's personality in Silwa are to be discussed. Infancy, with which we dealt in the last chapter, is regarded as the three or four years of the person's life at the end of which, whatever the family and individual variations may be, the infant is weaned, begins to talk and responds to adult commands. The following years are those of childhood until the age of twelve or thirteen, when the boy or the girl, at puberty, enters the adolescent stage.

In our consideration of the process of 'growing up' of children, there is hardly need to stress the fact that the process is not identical for all children. It is beyond any question that there are certain forces and conditions that bring about 'the distinctive personality constellations', e.g. the death of a sibling older or younger, loss of a mother, a father, state of child's health, child's birth order, age of parents at the time of child's birth.[1] These distinctive factors with their concomitant individual differences are recognized by the villagers. A child may be referred to as a 'child of old parents' (waldat 'ajayiz) and is usually characterized by being precocious in his development, or a 'child brought forth in the years of plenty or in the lean years', the former possessing easy and happy disposition, while the latter is expected to be nagging and irritable. In the next two chapters, however, the common prevailing forces that leave their impact on the personality development of the village children are discussed.

One of the main characteristics of this period of childhood is the pressure of sibling rivalry which is socially recognized, being evidenced in certain symbolic forms of wear, folk-lore, and symptoms of sickness. Sibling rivalry, however, is not peculiar to the child's growing up in Silwa, but, as demonstrated by Levy's projective doll-playing tests, 'represents a

[1] Clyde Kluckhohn, 'Personality Formation among the Navaho Indians', in *Sociometry*, Vol. IX, 1946, pp. 130–1.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

865 593 universal experience when a mother has more than one child in her own care'.[1] The peculiar side of it in this community is the way it is acknowledged and its use as an incentive in child development. In this treatment of the manifestations of sibling rivalry and the important part it plays in the formation of personality, no test of the Levy type was administered, but the cultural symbols and condensations were taken to offer ready-made data comparable to Levy's projective test.[2]

It is assumed in Silwa that the knee-baby is always jealous of the lap-baby, and the yard-baby is jealous of the knee-baby, and that this jealousy is irrespective of sex.[3] The absolute order of birth is maintained as the source of sibling rivalry and in the case of the death of the knee-baby, for example, the yard-baby will not be jealous of the lap-baby. The process is thus juxtapositional, each child always rivalling the immediately younger one who is 'above him' and who is also described as the one 'who pushes him away'. Jealousy is also believed to be one-way, as expressed in the [152] apprehensiveness of the older towards the younger, and not the converse, and therefore it is always the older who is jealous of the younger.

It is considered, according to one of my female informants, that sibling rivalry is essential in the process of a child's growth, particularly for the [853] boys. In the case of the first child, the mother usually induces him to suckle by offering her breast to a strange child. My informant went on to tell me of the folk story of the mother who had only one child and did 865 not bear any more. At the age of seven, however, her son displayed the physical and social maturity of a child of four, being a weakling who knew nothing about the world. This retarded growth worried his mother who consulted various people as to the best way of treating him. At last, she was advised by an old woman to send him to another household, which had many children in it, in another village and to keep him there for a year. During the first few weeks the boy used to sit with the other children round a dish of food, without getting sufficient to eat. Thus he was almost starved, his condition deteriorating. After that period, however, his rivalry with the other children was stimulated and he began to compete with them in eating, playing and running errands. Through this method his development accelerated, and as he became lively his mother took him back home.

It is believed that the arrival of a newborn baby helps to free the next [862] oldest baby from his mother and thus assist its weaning, otherwise it would 000 'stick to its mother's neck'. As the terminal baby, or, as it is sometimes

[1] See William Henry, 'The Thematic Apperception Technique in the Study of Cult[illegible] Personality Relations', in *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, Vol. XXXV. See also Susan Isaacs, *Social Development in Young Children*, London, 1937.

[2] Benjamin D. Paul, 'Symbolic Sibling Rivalry in a Guatemalan Indian Village', in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LII, 1950, p. 205.

[3] These stages of child development are adopted by Margaret Mead, 'Age Patterning in Personality Development', in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. XVII, 1947, pp. 230–40.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

as the terminal baby, or, as it is sometimes 865
called, the 'last of the bunch', has no rival, it is usually suckled longer and 858
is considered to be more demanding, thus requiring more protection and pampering since its natural growth is not assisted by the stimulus of rivalry. It is true that the last-born child in a family is regarded as spoilt, and in normal social life this fact could be used by others to account for its shortcomings.

It is also acknowledged that the youngest child becomes jealous im- 865
mediately his mother's abdomen becomes enlarged on pregnancy and he 593
is usually told of the forthcoming event. The mother hums phrases expres- 152
sing her sympathy with the child's jealousy and anxiety in store for him. The custom, though not so common now as it was twenty years ago, is for the older child after the birth of a new baby to wear round its neck one, [151]
two, or three cubes of sulphur called cubes of jealousy, wrapped in a piece of leather. This is supposed to minimize the dangers of excessive jealousy, as although jealousy is a healthy drive for growth, its excess might have ill effects on the child. It could induce diarrhoea, swellings, lack of appetite, temper tantrums, and sleeplessness.[1]

Such symptoms of illness caused by jealousy are diagnosed, and a tradi- 865
tional cure is administered by the mother, grandmother or an experienced 593
old woman. The cure is called 'kurfa', which literally means something 152
that dispels aggressiveness and sulkiness. The 'kurfa' consists of an egg 755
fried in oil with garlic and spices which is given to the child to eat, usually when his suckling sibling is asleep. Now the jealous child is in complete possession of his mother's attention; she feeds him on the 'kurfa', while he sits on her lap. He is told of how 'awful' his sibling is, and how 'nice and grown-up' he himself looks. After finishing his egg, the child's body is rubbed with the same cooking oil to ease the tensions of envy in his body. These titbits of food represent the few instances in which the knee-baby is allowed to recapture fully his mother's love and to dethrone his younger sibling. It is a symbolic acceptance of a break in the normal behaviour of the knee-baby, rewarded by regressive gratification. This 'kurfa' meal is [154]
a propitiatory means of enabling the older child to withstand the strains of sibling rivalry, and to accept the newborn baby with whom he has to identify himself later, either by looking after it or by taking it out to play. Such propitiation becomes more significant in the process of growing up when it is realized that the child is not allowed to manifest his anxiety over, or his deprivation from, his mother on pain of punishment. Such states of temper, tantrums or sulkiness are sometimes dealt with by the mother pretending to strike the younger baby who is the cause of the child's troubles. The great deal of roughness and aggression displayed in [154]
children's play outside the home could be considered as a cultural outlet for some of their repressed hostility towards their siblings and parents.

[1] 'Swelling and outbursting' are used figuratively in the villagers' language to denote [195]
jealousy. Especially in women's altercations, one hears the phrase, 'You have a swelling from me', meaning 'you are jealous'.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

865 593 Moreover, it was significant that when my informant declared that the rivalry was an essential incentive in the process of growing up, she added that it would enable the child to stand up to its rivals on becoming an adult. The use of sibling rivalry could also be related to the brothers' avoidance of each other, especially in formal gatherings, and also to the cultural expectation of brothers' friction and wranglings which are quite frequent amongst adults in the village.[1]

Certain families in the village try to provoke sibling rivalry, if it is not manifested strongly between children, by giving the older sibling a nickname, 'A ram which drinks from the water, left after baking'—meaning that he is good for nothing, while calling the younger sibling a camel—being a useful animal, and thus motivating the former to conform to what is expected from a boy of his age. In one of the families, Hassan, who is four years old, and Taha, who is two years old, are two brothers; one called 'Hassan al-dalihi'—the stupid one, while Taha is labelled 'al-nasih'—the clever. This nicknaming was due, according to their mother, to the fact that Hassan was seldom as alert as other boys of his age, and this nickname was supposed to shake him up. The writer noticed that Hassan was always asked to do things with reference to his younger brother. His mother would say: 'Eat this before Taha takes it', and this was accompanied by a movement towards Taha as if she was going to give him the food. Sometimes she would say: 'Take it, or I will give it to Taha', even if the latter were not present. In another house, the mother asked Fatima, the naughty girl, who was reluctant to comb her hair, to come to her before Sakina, the good girl, did so. Fatima was still disobedient, and so the mother started combing Sakina's hair, and immediately Fatima dashed towards her mother and lowered her head for combing. The normal procedure in giving nicknames is to call the younger child with a self-deprecating word, to appease the older one, which is compatible with the hierarchical structure of the family. Reversing this order, by giving a good name to the younger, is only resorted to for the purpose of fostering the desired amount of sibling rivalry indispensable in the villagers' views for healthy development. To experience rivalry with a sibling or cousin is regarded as making the child grow to be a 'hot' man, in contrast to one who is 'blunt'—who is not easily moved or provoked. It is also noticed that a visitor, on meeting a child of the house, usually asks him the hackneyed question: 'Who is better, you or your brother?' One is justified in considering the emphasis on sibling rivalry as a cultural means of motivating the child to abandon his babyish attitudes and behave according to his age.

[551] [867]

It is worth mentioning that the motivation of rivalry connected with the presence, actual or potential, of another person, is one of the strong incentives for appropriate behaviour, which combines social conformity with a high-pressure ego development.

[626]

[1] M. Fortes remarks that among the Tallensi, open recognition of sibling rivalry prevents it from turning into a disruptive element in the relations of siblings. *The Web of Kinship*, footnote, p. 235.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

high-pressure ego development. The sense of importance and worthiness is continually hammered into the children's minds through comparing them with either their sibling or other children.[1] It is no exaggeration to say that competitiveness in Silwa receives its first stimulus from sibling relationships, and is expressed in the popular saying that 'children who come on top of one another cannot get along with each other'. Siblings of different ages are expected to play in different age groups, especially after the age of six or seven. Although there is no institutionalized favouritism for the first son with regard to inheritance, for example, he is usually the most welcome member of the family as in his later life he will be his father's representative. It is no accident, then, that the first-born son receives more attention, as is usually expressed in his ceremonies of naming, circumcision, and wedding.

Together with this sibling relationship envisaged in a series of children chasing each other, one can hardly fail to note the difference of treatment between boys and girls in general. These disparities between the treatment of the two sexes are not mainly based on the superiority of the male sex or the female, but are largely founded on the relevance of the two sexes to the perpetuation of the family name and their respective economic activities.[2] The popular saying goes to the effect that the daughter's son should not receive much attention from his grandfather as such attention is wasted. However, it does not unduly worry parents in any way if their daughters do not show behaviour indications of rivalry during childhood. It will become clearer, as we proceed, that girls only enjoy relative indulgence during infancy, especially with regard to their comparatively longer period of suckling. But from childhood onwards they are expected to approach sociological adulthood more quickly than the boys.[3]

The second characteristic of the period of childhood is connected with the decreasing amount of care and attention given to the child by its mother. This is evidenced by the children's appearance during this stage of development. They are less clean in body and clothes, and it is not an unusual sight to find nasal mucus on children's faces. Mothers justify this neglect on the grounds that the child at this stage, where he is usually out with other children and thus exposed to the public, should not appear attractive for fear of the evil eye. This lack of interest in children's appearance usually continues until the age of nine, ten or eleven. Thereafter an unkempt or shabby child would be a disgrace to his parents. The renewed interest, especially in the child's clothes, after the age of ten, is related also to the need for covering the organs of reproduction by wearing

[1] For concrete statements of children concerning sibling rivalry, see Appendix VIII, 'Stewart Emotional Response Test', and Appendix X, 'Story Completion Test'.

[2] See Chapter I.

[3] It is assumed here that rivalry is socially inherited and is passed on from parents to their children. 'A mother through her attitude continues the old battle, and in the competitive struggles of her children she relives the competitive struggles of her childhood.' R. H. Hilgard, 'Sibling Rivalry and Social Heredity', in *Psychiatry*, Vol. 14, 1951.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

neighbourhood wrangling for some time. In this case, boys who have been sneaking are referred to by other boys as 'women', or in the case of girls are branded as 'loose' or 'prostitutes'. Parents' advice to their children is, 'Hit back him who hits you'.

Thus, before adolescence, a boy, not only through overhearing the gossip of his elders, but also through his age group norms, becomes aware of the significance of gossip as a means of social control. He is perhaps the cause of gossip or included in it, and this would expose him to shaming or avoidance by other children. The boy's friends might not speak to him and this would make him stand exposed and isolated.

Thus, it is obvious that though any signs of children's aggression towards adults is tabooed and punishable, their expression of hostility towards their age-mates is given full play. Rivalry and competition are mainly directed both in the adult and in the child world towards equals. Rivalry between generations seldom occurs, as it is mainly horizontal and not vertical.

The cultural axiom is for the adult to give and for the young to receive: to accept aid in kind or money from one's elders is permissible, while the reverse would be humiliating, or at least embarrassing, unless prescribed by kinship obligations, such as aid rendered by the son to his father in old age.

There is a vivid contrast between the lively, free, and rough behaviour of children in their groups and their shy and diffident manners when they are attending grown-ups, while eating or during any celebration in the house. On being punished or rebuked by his elders, the child is expected to obey, while if he shows any submissiveness, if wronged by his 'pals', he would be punished by his parents and would be asked to retaliate for himself. A boy was called Abdu the Batil (the coward) by his pals, a name for which he seemed to have no outward resentment. On asking the boy about how he got this nickname, he told me that his father had applied the name to him and told the other boys with whom he associated to call him so, as his father was annoyed by his constant appeals to his parents to protect him from other children.

After reviewing the general atmosphere of the two educative spheres in the child's life, it is appropriate to discuss the means by which some social norms are impressed on him. As mentioned earlier, one of the cardinal virtues of a disciplined child is his respect for his elders. Till the age of four or five, this respect expresses itself in the young boy, on being introduced to a gathering in the house, touching the older person's hands with his lips and forehead. When the child grows older, this is replaced by a handshake followed immediately by his withdrawal from the adult gathering. The sign of respect by kissing the older person's hand with one's lips and forehead, although it ceases to apply amongst village people themselves, would still be practised by older boys and adults towards strangers visiting the house. Moreover, this is always the sign of respect for

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

responsible for the adult defence mechanism of rigidity and caution. However, one of the well-known characteristics of the Egyptian fellah is his stubbornness, obstinacy and tenacity, which sometimes take the form of an obsession.

Connected with producing fear in the children is the violent and bad-tempered manner in which adults administer punishment to them. Punishment, however, may be in the form of fulminations or curses, or it may be corporal. As mentioned earlier, a father may curse his son by saying 'Curse on your father; a curse on your people; a curse on your origin (seed)', and so on. It seems that such curses have their effect on the children. A child of about nine years old told me that the curse of his parents, especially that of his mother, when she uncovers her head, is a thing which he tries to avoid; one cannot enter Paradise if one invokes one's parents' anger, and their blessings increase one's span of life. Punishment can also take the form of denouncing the boy as a girl, or condemning him as a homosexual, and also through depriving him of his food or his share of meat. On certain occasions, if the child shows reluctance to comply with, or to conform to, its elders' commands, they impugn one of its senses by expressing their disapproval or reproach in phrases such as, 'Aren't you listening?' 'Haven't you got eyes to see?' 'Are you blind?' 'Don't you smell?' 'Don't you feel?' 'Haven't you got blood?' Such phrases imply that the child should have done the accepted thing without being prompted, because he has only to make use of one of his senses. It is occasionally pointed out to the child that his jaw which uttered the words, or his hand that committed the offence, or his ears that heard the unpermissible, should be punished.

Corporal punishment is not uncommon either by beating, striking, whipping or slapping. Such punishment is inflicted upon the child normally after he has committed a serious misdemeanour, such as talking back at his parents while being rebuked, throwing stones at his mother, causing trouble with the neighbours' children, or on complaints being made against him by an older person. The child's ambivalent attitude towards its parents or uncles expresses itself in its appeal for their mercy when it is thrashed by one of them. He makes a screaming appeal, by crying out: 'O father, O father, by the name of the Prophet, O father', even if the father himself happens to be the one who is thrashing him.

The mother invariably gets the worst of the child's temper, aggression and disobedience, and consequently she is apt to administer punishment more frequently than the father. She is the parent with whom the child comes into active contact in terms of give and take. The child feels her punishing powers as he breaks things, loiters on being sent on an errand, loses money which he was given to buy things from the shop, or when he makes himself a nuisance when visitors are in the house, and similar other misdemeanours. Having more contacts with children's problems of up-bringing, the mother tends to be the target of their ambivalence; they

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

wrangle and quarrel with her, are rude to her, run outside the house and throw stones at the door or climb the wall and swear at her. On the other hand, children feel that the mother is their most reliable source of care and affection, and that she is more accessible and amenable than the father. In this capacity she is the one usually approached for expressing their wishes or asked to mediate between them and the father. Mothers themselves recognize that their treatment of children is different from that of the father. This is epitomized in the mothers' popular saying to their children in persuading them to obey them: 'On the death of my father I eat dates; on the death of my mother I eat hot coal.' In this way the mother tries to win from her offspring assistance and service as she is not invested with the same power of authority as the father. On the other hand, withdrawal from the father, keeping away from his bed while he is asleep, and keeping quiet while he is about the house, is told and retold to children by the mother or older siblings for fear of punishment. The father's authority cannot be flouted; and a change in the tone of his voice must be seriously considered. Although his punishment might be less frequent than that of the mother, yet it is certainly more severely administered. While the former pinches the ear, or the thigh, and seldom slaps, the latter normally slaps and thrashes with a rope or a cane.

It is also worth noting here that very little chance is given to the child to justify his misdemeanour, and hardly any effort is made to persuade him to avoid falling into the same error. Moreover, in administering punishment, there is no consistency or regularity; for the same offence the child might be beaten harshly, or his offence allowed to pass unnoticed. This depends, of course, on the parents' mood, or on their feeling towards the child at that particular time.

Such methods for disciplining the child normally lead to the child's attempts to tell lies or go for things in a roundabout way to evade punishment. He would swear that he has not committed a fault and that it is someone else who is responsible for it, or that he was forced by older or stronger boys to do it.[1] Deceptive tricks are frequently adopted in games when, for instance, a boy tries to frighten another boy by saying that the latter's father is approaching with a stick and thus seek to compel him to leave the game. An older boy, in trying to deceive younger children, would run in front of them shouting in terror, 'The Silowa is coming, the Silowa is coming', and the young boys would disperse. One boy might tell a group of boys an untrue story, and if the teller succeeds in making his listeners 'swallow' it he would vaunt his triumph over them by saying, 'I've been telling lies. I've cut your ears off—Kaddabt 'alaikum, gattat wadanaikum.'

[1] It is interesting to note that in the Kuttab (Koran school), Kuttab sheikh enquires from one of the boys about his misdemeanour and the other boys volunteer without being asked to give evidence confirming the boy's offence. With this also goes constant attempts of children to correct each other's behaviour or ways of learning or attention.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

INDIGENOUS LEARNING AND TEACHING

This is the normal routine of the Kuttab, one which has now been challenged by the compulsory school which does not allow any boy between seven and twelve years old to attend the Kuttab for a full day, and at present only those who are less than seven or over twelve can afford to remain in the Kuttab for the full day. In spite of this some of the compulsory school boys attend the Kuttab early in the morning where they write their Koranic assignment before going to the school; some of them bring their loaves of bread at lunch-time for the Sheikh, and spend about an hour after the end of the school day in the Kuttab learning the Koran.

The Kuttab is not merely an educational institution for the boys. Adults also visit it to consult the Sheikh about certain religious matters, to have a letter written, or a charm supplied against the evil eye, or just to listen to the Koran being recited, or even for an ordinary chat. They have free access to the Kuttab, sitting outside or in the outer room, or they may enter it to ask the Sheikh's permission to take away their boy temporarily for some pressing errand or task. One occasionally sees adults bringing food or tea to Kuttab children as a 'karama', or to invoke the boys' purity in asking God to fulfil one of his wishes. The Kuttab boys are supposed to combine the innocence of children with the 'baraka' of the Koran, and hence their prayers are usually answered by God. Parents go to the Kuttab to complain to the Sheikh about the misdemeanours of their sons, whereupon the Sheikh would give the boys concerned a lesson on the importance of obedience to parents, or threaten them, or even thrash them in front of their parents. The method of discipline in the Kuttab is that of *jus flagelli*. In cases of serious offences such as offending one's father or swearing at religion, or mentioning the mother in swearing, two strong boys would hold the offender's feet in a turban (usually the offender's turban if he wears one), and lift them in front of the Sheikh, who would administer the striking as he deems fit. The corporal punishment administered to the children by the Kuttab Sheikh is almost universally accepted by the villagers without complaint. During my stay, there was only one occasion on which one of the villagers lodged a complaint against the Sheikh to the police, accusing the former of unduly thrashing his son, and this, according to the Sheikh himself, was the first event of its kind in his lifetime. Since then none of the Sheikhs has accepted that boy in his Kuttab.

The Sheikhs are indeed highly respected in the village, for they not only teach the boys the Koran, but derive their status from the fact that they are the perpetuators of the Holy Book giving enlightenment to the people on religious matters. In Silwa and its neighbouring villages, the leaders of the mosque prayers (Imams) are always Kuttab Sheikhs, and people seek their advice if they are in doubt whether a particular action or deed is in conformity with religious injunctions. Some of them also recite the Koran during the nightly celebration in Ramadan and at